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ABSTRACT

A study examined the way in which vocational and technical faculty and students perceive the effectiveness of French and Raven's five power bases. (To explain the way in which organizational control operates, French and Raven postulated the following five power bases: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power.) During the study, researchers surveyed 193 students from 10 home schools and 13 vocational and technical shops as well as 10 shop instructors. These individuals were asked to rank their perception of the frequency of use of each of the behavior control categories and to rate the effectiveness of each power base. Referent power far outranked the other power bases as the most effective means of control while punishment was ranked as the least effective control strategy. In terms of frequency of use, students felt that the vocational teachers used referent and expert power more frequently than did the home school teachers, while the home school teachers are perceived to use punishment far more frequently than the vocational teachers. Based on these findings, recommendations were made calling for shop instructors to do more to cultivate their expert power and to rely more heavily upon legitimate than on reward power. (Tables summarizing survey findings are appended.) (MN)

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The Perceived Effectiveness of French and Raven's Five Power Bases for Vocational High School Teachers and Students

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One salient fact arising from the investigations of successful vocational teachers is their ability to control students. Classroom management practices are essential elements for successful teaching and learning (Ponder & Hinely, 1982). Casual observation shows that, in general, there are fewer discipline problems in vocational education programs than in general education. The specific reasons for this situation have not been researched but one might speculate that vocational educators, familiar with the phrase, "Having the tools of the trade" before going to work, might have acquired up-to-date 'tools' in strategies of classroom and laboratory management (Barrett, 1979).

Unfortunately the literature reveals that vocational teachers have little basis to claim a connection between their classroom management skills and positive student behaviors. Studies show vocational teachers have needs for training in handling discipline problems that have not been met by preservice or inservice education, show a discrepency between their corrective behaviors with students and what experts felt ought to be done, and show a reliance upon short-term solutions (Riley, 1979). Further, vocational teachers, as well as most classroom teachers, have not had formal instruction in classroom management strategies. They practice techniques that have been modeled for them, they turn to fellow faculty (often

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equally untrained) for help, and they have a tendency to rely upon purely personal opinions and biases, practiced over time, as if they were established findings of empirical research (Ausubel, 1961).

Background

To better understand how control operates, a fruitful approach is to turn to the literature on organizational behavior, a field closely related to education. The concept of social bases of power as control has held a prominent position in the organizational behavior literature, explaining such diverse areas as organizational accountability (Knouse, 1979) and worker motivation (Sussman & Vecchio, 1982). Among the theories of power, the five power bases of French and Raven (1959) has been shown to be the most robust both in scope and in application (Cobb, 1980).

The first of French and Raven's power bases, reward, depends upon the person having the resources to reward others (i.e., one controls something others desire). Coercive power, on the other hand, is the ability of a person to inflict negative consequences, such as punishment or threats, on others. The third base, legitimate power, is more or less synonymous with the concept of authority. People by virtue of their positions have the legitimate right to influence others, and the others feel an obligation to accept this power.

Referent power, the fourth base, derives from others identifying with the person (they want to be like this person), usually because the teacher has desirable personal characteristics. The final base, expert power, occurs when others attribute special knowledge and expertise to the person. This knowledge is important for achieving the task at hand in the correct manner.

The first three power bases (reward, coercive, and legitimate) are viewed as positional powers stemming from the position the person holds in the organization. The latter two bases (referent and expert) are viewed as personal powers deriving from the personal characteristics of the person. In addition, legitimate and expert power are thought to be particularly effective because they depend upon the internalized values of others (authority and the importance of knowledge, respectively); while reward and coercive power are less effective because they depend upon the continual presence of the person for dispensing rewards and punishments. The importance of these rewards and punishments for others may vary widely.

Therefore, based upon these two factors of position versus personal orientation to power and the degree of internalization of values associated with power, a somewhat loose theoretical ordering of these five power bases is possible. Expert power, which is at the same time a personal power and dependent upon internalized values, should be most effective. Reward and coercive powers, on the other hand, which are positional powers and are subject to situational constraints, should be least effective.

The remaining power bases should theoretically be of intermediate effectiveness. Legitimate power is derived from the important internalized value of authority but is a positional power. Referent power is the opposite case--based upon less important values but dependent upon the individual's personal attributes.

Empirical studies generally tend to support this theoretical ordering. Expert power is most effective, while reward and coercive power are least effective. Moreover, referent power is related to measures of organ-

izational effectiveness, while legitimate power shows inconsistent relationships (Backman, Bowers, & Barcus, 1968; Dunne, Stahl, Melhart, 1978; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1970; Shelty, 1978).

Similarly, the present study predicts an ordering of effectiveness of power bases in the vocational school environment: expert as most effective, followed by referent and legitimate, with reward and coercive as least effective.

Another important class of variables mediating power bases is the status characteristics of the person in power, which affect expectations of effectiveness in others (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977). Sex of the person, for example, is an important status characteristic. Females are perceived to be more effective when using the female-stereotyped nurturance properties of reward, while males, who are stereotyped as more competent, are perceived to be more effective users of expert power (Wiley & Eskilson, 1982).

Status characteristics for the teacher, therefore, are also predicted to mediate the perceived effectiveness of power bases in the present study. Type of teacher should be important. The vocational teachers, who impart important knowledge for future jobs, should be perceived as better wielders of expert power, for example, than home school teachers, who deal with more arcane academic subjects. In addition, vocational students should more closely identify with vocational teachers than their less job-oriented home school teachers. Hence vocational teachers should be better wielders of referent power.

Based upon the organizational behavior literature on power bases, the following hypotheses are proposed.

1. There is an ordering of the effectiveness of the five power bases proceeding from expert power to referent power to legitimate power to reward power to punishment. Within this ordering, personal power bases (expert and referent power) are more effective than positional power bases (legitimate, reward, and punishment power).
2. Students perceive that their vocational teachers wield the five power bases differently than their home school teachers.

Goals of the Study

The major goals of this study were to investigate how vocational-technical faculty and students perceive the effectiveness of French and Raven's power bases; to determine the degree to which their perceptions support theory; and to measure the congruence that exists in these perceptions among students, votech faculty, and home school teachers.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 193 students, 134 males and 59 females, enrolled in the spring term as sophomores, juniors or seniors in an area vocational-technical high school. The students attended the votech school on a week-about basis; one week at the home school and one week at the votech school. Ten home schools and 13 votech shops were represented. Further, the sample consisted of input from 10 shop instructors.

Procedures

In order to help students categorize methods of discipline, students were given an author prepared "Survey Discipline Methods - Home School

and ECTS." The session leader, either the principal, counselor, or curriculum specialist, presented each of the five categories of discipline being sure to offer two to three concrete examples of teacher behavior consistent with each category. The session leader then had the students complete the survey, ranking their perception of the frequency of use of each category by votech and home school teachers and the effectiveness of each category in controlling their behavior when used by teachers. Votech faculty were approached individually, given an explanation of the purpose of the investigation, given an explanation of the five bases of social power, and then asked to complete a survey similar to that of the students.

Survey of Discipline Methods - Home School & ECTS

The survey instrument is based upon the five bases of social power identified and researched by French and Raven. The specific terms used by French and Raven were translated into short descriptions and examples to further insure understanding by students. For example, coercive power was translated into "relies on the use of punishment (instructors believe you behave because they have the power to administer punishment)," while referent power was translated into "relies on a feeling of oneness with you (instructors believe you behave because you identify with them; they believe you respect the them personally). The survey asked for a ranking of the frequency of use by shop instructors and by home school teachers and asked for a ranking of the effectiveness of each power base when used by both teachers.

The survey administered to shop instructors asked them to rank the frequency with which they use each power base and asked them to rank the effectiveness of each power base in causing students to behave.

Results

Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that the five power bases display an ordering of effectiveness proceeding from expert to referent to legitimate to reward to punishment powers, respectively; and personal power bases (expert and referent) are more effective than positional power bases. To test this prediction, differences among the students' ranked effectiveness for the power bases were subjected to pair-wise comparison t-tests. Table 1 reveals that referent power was ranked as significantly most effective, while punishment was ranked as significantly least effective. No significant differences occurred among expert, reward, and legitimate power. Thus, a somewhat different ordering than predicted occurred, although the predicted emphasis upon personal power bases as more effective than positional power bases was supported.

Table 1 about here

When the vocational teachers themselves ranked the effectiveness of their use of the power bases, an ordering somewhat similar to that of the students occurred as shown in Table 2. The major difference was that the teachers ranked reward power as less effective than legitimate power as originally predicted, whereas the students ranked the two power bases equivalently.

Table 2 about here

Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that students perceive their vocational teachers to wield the five power bases differently from their home school

teachers. In terms of frequency of use, Table 3 shows that the vocational teachers are perceived to use referent power and expert power significantly more frequently than the home school teachers, while the home school teachers are perceived to use punishment significantly more frequently than the vocational teachers.

Table 3 about here

Discussion

Summary of Results

The exact ordering of the effectiveness of the five power bases for the vocational school situation was somewhat different than predicted, although the predicted emphasis upon personal power bases (referent and expert power) was supported. The predicted difference in perceived use of the power bases between vocational school teachers and home school teachers was also supported. Vocational teachers tended to emphasize personal power bases, while home school teachers emphasized positional bases.

Referent Power

Both the students and their vocational teachers perceived referent power as the most effective power base. Further investigation of the concept of referent power in the vocational school situation would thus appear to be fruitful.

One approach is to turn to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Recently educational theorists (e.g., Cooper, 1982) have explained the effectiveness of an educator's referent power in terms of the teacher as a role model for the students. Within this framework, it would be recom-

mended that the vocational teacher focus upon those attributes which enhance his or her efficacy as a role model, such as attitudinal and behavioral characteristics which increase student desire to be like the teacher. Further, referent power can be tied into expert power (the second most effective power base according to the present study) when the teacher adopts educational goals that are important to the students' values (e.g., instruction that is meaningful in terms of securing a desirable job and then successfully performing that job).

Educational theorists caution, however, that the role model approach has limitations (Cooper, 1982; Schein & Bennis, 1965). When a student strongly identifies with the teacher as role model, the student may be restricting the acquisition of new information to what the teacher-role model presents. Thus what the student learns from the teacher may not be generalizable to other situations, such as taking on a job after graduation. One means of dealing with this difficulty in transferring learning is the concept of self-regulation of behavior (Bandura, 1978). According to this view, the student would gradually change the control of the learning environment from the power base influence of the teacher to a self-control influence system through such internal rewards as self-pride and self-satisfaction. Indeed, Bandura emphasizes the importance of self-referents in this process; that is, students would be transferring identification from the referent power base of the teacher to a self-referent base within their self-concept.

Within the vocational school context, this transfer of referent power bases may be aided through on-site vocational co-op experiences. The student can then gradually wean himself or herself from the teacher's

influence base to self-control of the situation without having to suffer the sudden shock of being cast out of the comfortable academic womb upon graduation into the harsh world of work.

Feedback to Shop Instructors

Shop instructors should be made further aware of French & Raven's Social Bases of Power, the literature supporting a theoretical ordering from expert power through coercive power, and the differences between personal and positional powers. While it should be pointed out that students ranked referent power as significantly most effective and punishment as significantly least effective, thus supporting theory, shop instructors should be encouraged to do more to cultivate their expert power. Shop instructors should also be sensitive to the disparity between their perception and the students' perception of the relative effectiveness of reward and legitimate power. To the extent possible, faculty should engage in behaviors that are likely to cause the students' perception of these two power bases to become more in line with their own perception - legitimate power being more effective than reward power.

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Table 1

Differences among Students' Ranked Effectiveness for the Five Power Bases for Vocational Technical School Teachers

	Power Base			
Power Base	Expert	Reward	Legitimate	Punishment
Referent	.70***	.76***	.95***	1.56***
(M=2.21)	(t=5.58)	(t=5.53)	(t=6.70)	(t=9.84)
Expert		.06	.25	.86***
(M2.91)		(t=.40)	(t=1.77)	(t=5.04)
Reward			.19	.80**
(M=2.97)			(t=1.29)	(t=4.96)
Legitimate				.61***
(M=3.16)				(t=4.01)
Punishment				
(M=3.77)				

df=192

***p <.001

Table 2

Comparison of Students' and Vocational Teachers' Rankings of the Effectiveness of the Five Power Bases

	Respondent				
	Students		Teachers		
Power Base	M	SD	M	SD	t
Referent	2.21	1.20	1.81	0.57	4.11***
Expert	2.91	1.33	2.30	0.89	5.18***
Reward	2.97	1.38	3.84	0.92	6.75***
Legitimate	3.16	1.23	2.85	1.35	2.40*
Punishment	3.77	1.50	4.19	1.48	2.63**

df=192

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

Table 3

Student Ranking of the Frequency of Use of the Five Power Bases by Vocational Teachers Compared to Home School Teachers

	Power Wielder				
	Vocational Teachers		Home School Teachers		
Power Base	M	SD	M	SD	t
Referent	2.52	1.34	3.37	1.20	6.58***
Expert	3.06	1.22	3.35	1.21	2.52*
Reward	3.94	1.23	3.88	1.29	0.50
Legitimate	2.57	1.18	2.52	1.09	0.42
Punishment	2.95	1.62	1.87	1.33	7.45***

df=192

*p <.05

**p <.01

***p <.001

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